15.06.1999. No time can be specified as proposals are received from time to time and processed in accordance with the prescribed procedure.

Pitiable condition of Elderly people in Himachal Pradesh

1919. SHRI ANIL SHARMA: Will the Minister of SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have decided to observe the 1999 and 2000 as the years of elderly people;

(b) if so, the steps taken and schemes introduced to ameliorate the pitiable condition of this section of society in the State of Himachal Pradesh from which most of the youths are serving in Army;

(c) whether Government propose to set up a National Commission for Old People; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL JUSTIC AND EMPOWERMENT (SHRIMATI MANEKA GANDHI): (a) The year 1999 has been declared by the United Nations as the International Year for Older Persons while the National Policy on Older persons, announced by the Government, mentions that the year 2000 will be declared as the National Year for Older Persons.

(a) To observe the year 1999 as International Year of Older Persons, the Government announced the National Policy on Older Persons in January, 1999. A National Council for Older Persons has since been set up to operationalise the National Policy. Several initiatives/measures have been taken in pursuance of the National Policy. All State Governments including the State Government of Himachal Pradesh have been requested to chalk out an Action Plan for welfare of older persons, as envisaged in the Policy.

Besides, the Ministry had reviewed and revised its two on going schemes for welfare of older persons in light of the National Policy on Older Persons and these are now called as: (i) An Integrated Programme for Older Persons and (ii) Scheme of Assistance to Panchayati Raj Institutions/Voluntary Organisations/Self Help Groups for Construction of Old Age Home/Multi Service Centres for

Older Persons. Under the scheme of 'An Integrated Programme for Older Persons', financial assistance is provided to voluntary organisations for establishing and maintaining Old Age Homes, Day Care Centres and Mobile Medicare Units etc. The other scheme mentioned above aims at providing one time financial grant for construction of old age homes or multi-service centres. Under the scheme mentioned at (i) above, financial assistance is being given to a voluntary organiation in Himachal Pradesh for running a Day Care Centre and a Mobile Medicare Unit for Older Persons.

(c) and (d) No, Sir, However, a National Council for Older Persons has already been established under the Chairmanship of the Minster of State for Social Justice and Empowermnet to operationalize the National Policy on Older Persons.

Abolition of Devdasi Tradition

†1920. SHRI JHUMUK LAL BHENDIA: Will the Minister of SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Devdasi tradition which is continuously prevailing in the Indian society since long has become synonymous with flesh trade;

(b) the names of the States where this evil practice is prevalent;

(c) whether poverty, starvation, unemployment and illiteracy are the root cause of this tradition; and

(e) if so, the role of Government in protecting the human rights and abolishing this evil tradition which has continued to exist in the name of religion?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT (SHRIMATI MANEKA GANDHI): (a) and (b) The Devdasi system which was prevalent in some parts of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtara has been legally banned. Despite this, there are some reports that dedication in the name of God still continues, clandestinely, on a smaller scale. In earlier times when social bonds and practices were stronger, the system found its own means of sustaining such dedicated

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.